

Appalachian Values and Victims of Violence

A Workshop presented by Karen Vuranch

1. Introduction

“I believe that God sent his strongest people to Appalachia. I think that if one could take a hundred men and women, such as those who have written so many articles about a people and place of which they knew so little, and place these people here and have them live the way our folk did – before one year was up ninety-nine would starve to death and other one would go crazy.”

-- Verna Mae Sloan, What My Heart Wants to Tell

2. Where Appalachian people live

- a. Branchwater folk
- b. Valley farms
- c. Towns and cities are also a part of the Appalachian experience

3. First Settlers

- a. Scots-Irish – perhaps the largest group, but not the only settlers
- b. Also, Native people, other European immigrants, escaped slaves
- c. Why choose this forbidding terrain? What do these people have in common?
- d. By the time of the Westward Movement in America (1850's), Appalachia had entered into American consciousness as a distinct region, referred to as “a strange land and a strange people” by journalists such as Will Henry Harney.

“The frontier of white against Indian has faded from consciousness; the ‘frontier’ concept was transferred to a newly important boundary – the one between industrial society and non-industrial. Mountaineers were no longer on the fringe – instead they were all together on the wrong side of the ‘frontier.’”

-- Roger Cunningham, Apples in the Flood

- e. Civil War continues to divide communities

4. Resulting Influences

- A. If indeed Scots-Irish were the largest single group, what cultural baggage did they bring?
 - a. Propensity toward violence
 - b. Preference for scattered farms resulting in isolation – had to rely on family
 - c. Independent – questioned authority and anti-government
 - d. Religious fervor – individualistic and fatalistic
 - e. Language patterns
 - f. Folk music, tales, arts and crafts
 - g. Tradition of strong women
- B. What other traits developed because of isolation and grueling lifestyle?
 - a. Neighborliness – critical in isolated areas
 - b. Worked hard – didn't stay children long

- c. Distinct chores/roles for men and women evolve
- d. Men and women are not romantically dependent

“The husband was often taken by death in the mines or through the hardness and hazards of frontier life, and the wife would be forced to carry on by herself to keep the family together. Likewise, illness or death in childbirth might remove the woman before her time. This lack of closeness has made it easier for the remaining parent to maintain the household, along with the help of the extended family. It is remarkable how many such broken-by-death families exist in the mountains.” -- Jack Weller, Yesterday's People

5. *Appalachia Today*

- a. Affect of Industrialization – railroads, coal mines, etc.
- b. Increased technology / weak economy – creates high unemployment rate
- c. More women working outside the home

“Thus, bit by bit, as her husband's role has decreased and as his life has lost its meaning, her life has taken on a new meaning in the community or at work. This situation is leading to a reversal of the roles of the sexes in mountain life. The woman is becoming the strong one, able to make decisions and cope with an increasingly complex world.” -- Jack Weller, Yesterday's People

- d. Mobile society – many outsiders are moving in and mountain people leaving / internet and television make the world accessible
- e. Violent crimes and victims increasing – Cultural traditions don't inhibit violence and create a barrier to getting help
 - 1. Cultural tradition expect people, especially men, to be “tough”
 - 2. Fiercely independent and anti-authority
 - 3. Problems should be taken care of within the family
 - 4. Men and women often don't have romantic dependencies – easier to be violent
 - 5. There is an expectation to make children “tough”
 - 6. Religion often used to justify violence (“An eye for an eye,” or references to women's subjugation to their husbands, etc.)

(Brainstorm about other cultural traditions)

- f. Brainstorm about ways to overcome cultural barriers and helping victims of crime
- g. But, enduring values and strong sense of place

“Then...there it was, and I know it was better than all three of us figured it would be. The capitol building sprawled gray concrete like a regal queen spreading out her petticoats, and its giant dome glittered pure gold in the morning sun. I felt in me an embarrassing sense of pride that she was ours. That we weren't just shut-down old coal mines and people on welfare like the rest of the country wanted to believe we were. We were this majestic, elegant thing sitting solid, sparkling in the light.” -- Cynthia Rylant, Missing May